

**BOOKS
AND
BOOK
LOVERS**

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BOOKS
AND
BOOK LOVERS

CHOSEN BY

RALPH A. LYON



EVANSTON
WILLIAM S. LORD
1901

“I thank God continually that it hath been my lot in life to found an empire in my heart—no cramped and wizened borough wherein one jealous mistress hath exercised her petty tyranny, but an expansive and ever-widening continent divided and subdivided into dominions, jurisdictions, caliphates, chiefdoms, seneschalships, and prefectures, wherein tetrarchs, burgraves, maharajahs, palatines, seigniors, caziques, nabobs, emirs, nizams, and nawabs hold sway, each over his special and particular realm, and all bound together in harmonious co-operation by the conciliating spirit of polybibliophily !”

EUGENE FIELD.

[*The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac.*]

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14 Jan 44
General Jones
Chas. Yale

Essays on
Books and Book Lovers

THE BIBLIOMANIAC*

HOW easily one may distinguish a genuine lover of books from a worldly man! With what subdued and yet glowing enthusiasm does he gaze upon the costly front of a thousand embattled volumes! How gently he draws them down, as if they were little children; how tenderly he handles them! He peers at the title-page, at the text, or the notes, with the nicety of a bird examining a flower. He studies the binding: the leather, russia, English calf, morocco; the lettering, the gilding, the

*From "Star Papers," by Henry Ward Beecher.

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edging, the hinge of the cover! He opens it and shuts it; he holds it off and brings it nigh. It suffuses his whole body with book magnetism. He walks up and down in a maze at the mysterious allotments of Providence, that gives so much money to men who spend it upon their appetites, and so little to men who would spend it in benevolence or upon their refined tastes! It is astonishing, too, how one's necessities multiply in the presence of the supply. One never knows how many things it is impossible to do without till he goes to Windle's or Smith's house-furnishing stores. One is surprised to perceive, at some bazaar or fancy and variety store, how many *conveniences* he needs. He is satisfied that his life must have been utterly inconvenient aforetime. And thus, too, one is inwardly convicted, at Appletons', of having lived for years without books

which he is now satisfied that one cannot live without!

Then, too, the subtle process by which the man convinces himself that he can afford to buy. No subtle manager or broker ever saw through a maze of financial embarrassments half so quick as a poor book-buyer sees his way clear to pay for what he *must* have. He promises himself marvels of retrenchment; he will eat less, or less costly viands, that he may buy more food for the mind. He will take an extra patch, and go on with his rainment another year, and buy books instead of coats. Yea, he will write books, that he may buy books! The appetite is insatiable. Feeding does not satisfy it. It rages by the fuel which is put upon it. As a hungry man eats first and pays afterward, so the book-buyer purchases and then works at the debt afterward. This paying is rather medicinal. It

cures for a time. But a relapse takes place. The same longing, the same promises of self-denial. He promises himself to put spurs on both heels of his industry; and then, besides all this, he will *somehow* get along when the time for payment comes! Ah! this SOMEHOW! That word is as big as a whole world, and is stuffed with all the vagaries and fantasies that Fancy ever bred upon Hope. And yet, is there not some comfort in buying books, *to be* paid for? We have heard of a sot who wished his neck as long as the worm of a still, that he might so much the longer enjoy the flavor of the draught! Thus, it is a prolonged excitement of purchase, if you feel for six months in a slight doubt whether the book is honestly your own or not. Had you paid down, that would have been the end of it. There would have been no affectionate and beseeching look

of your books at you, every time you saw them, saying, as plain as a book's eyes can say, "Do not let me be taken from you."

Moreover, buying books before you can pay for them promotes caution. You do not feel quite at liberty to take them home. You are married. Your wife keeps an account-book. She knows to a penny what you can and what you cannot afford. She has no "speculation" in *her* eyes. Plain figures make desperate work with airy "*somehows*." It is a matter of no small skill and experience to get your books home, and into their proper places, undiscovered. Perhaps the blundering express brings them to the door just at evening. "What is it, my dear?" she says to you. "Oh! nothing—a few books that I cannot do without." That smile! A true housewife that loves her husband can smile a whole arithmetic at him in one look! Of

course she insists, in the kindest way, in sympathizing with you in your literary acquisition. She cuts the strings of the bundle (and of your heart), and out comes the whole story. You have bought a complete set of costly English books, full bound in calf, extra gilt! You are caught, and feel very much as if bound in calf yourself, and admirably lettered.

Now, this must not happen frequently. The books must be smuggled home. Let them be sent to some near place. Then, when your wife has a headache, or is out making a call, or has lain down, run the books across the frontier and threshold, hastily undo them, stop only for one loving glance as you put them away in the closet, or behind other books on the shelf, or on the topmost shelf. Clear away the twine and wrapping-paper, and every suspicious circumstance. Be very careful not

to be too kind. That often brings on detection. Only the other day we heard it said, somewhere, "Why, how good you have been lately. I am really afraid you have been carrying on mischief secretly." Our heart smote us. It was a fact. That very day we had bought a few books which "we could not do without." After a while you can bring out one volume, accidentally, and leave it on the table. "Why, my dear, *what* a beautiful book! Where *did* you borrow it?" You can glance over the newspaper, with the quietest tone you can command: "*That!* oh that is *mine*. Have you not seen it before? It has been in the house these two months;" and you rush on with anecdote and incident, and point out the binding, and that peculiar trick of gilding, and everything else you can think of; but it all will not do; you cannot rub out that roguish arith-

metical smile. People may talk about the equality of the sexes! They are not equal. The silent smile of a sensible, loving woman will vanquish ten men. Of course you repent, and in time form a habit of repenting.

Another method which will be found peculiarly effective is to make a *present* of some fine work to your wife. Of course, whether she or you have the name of buying it, it will go into your collection, and be yours to all intents and purposes. But it stops remark in the presentation. A wife could not reprove you for so kindly thinking of her. No matter what she suspects, she will say nothing. And then if there are three or four more works which have come home with the gift-book—they will pass through the favor of the other.

12 These are pleasures denied to wealth

and old bachelors. Indeed, one cannot imagine the peculiar pleasure of buying books if one is rich and stupid. There must be some pleasure, or so many would not do it. But the full flavor, the whole relish of delight only comes to those who are so poor that they must engineer for every book. They sit down before them, and besiege them. They are captured. Each book has a secret history of ways and means. It reminds you of subtle devices by which you insured and made it yours, in spite of poverty !

May 25, 1854.

NON LIBRI SED LIBERI *

IT will never be clear to the lay mind why the book-buyer buys books. That it is not to read them is certain: the closest inspection always fails to find him thus engaged. He will talk about them—all night if you let him—wave his hand to them, shake his fist at them, shed tears over them (in the small hours of the morning); but he will not read them. Yet it would be rash to infer that he buys his books without a remote intention of ever reading them. Most book-lovers start with the honest resolution that some day they will ‘shut down on’ this fatal practice. Then they purpose to them-

14 *From “Pagan Papers,” by Kenneth Grahame. Copyright, John Lane, New York.

selves to enter into their charmed circle, and close the gates of Paradise behind them. Then will they read out of nothing but first editions; every day shall be a debauch in large paper and tall copies; and crushed morocco shall be familiar to their touch as buckram. Meanwhile, though, books continue to flaunt their venal charms; it would be cowardice to shun the fray. In fine, one buys and continues to buy; and the promised Sabbath never comes.

The process of the purchase is always much the same, therein resembling the familiar but inferior passion of love. There is the first sight of the Object, accompanied of a catching of the breath, a trembling in the limbs, loss of appetite; ungovernable desire, and a habit of melancholy in secret places. But once possessed, once toyed with amorously for an hour or

two, the Object (as in the inferior passion aforesaid) takes its destined place on the shelf—where it stays. And this, saith the scoffer, is all ; but even he does not fail to remark with a certain awe that the owner goeth thereafter as one possessing a happy secret and radiating an inner glow. Moreover, he is insufferably conceited, and his conceit waxeth as his coat, now condemned to a fresh term of servitude, groweth shabbier. And shabby though his coat may be, yet will he never stoop to renew its pristine youth and gloss by the price of any book. No man—no human, masculine, natural man—ever sells a book. Men have been known in moments of thoughtlessness, or compelled by temporary necessity, to rob, to equivocate, to do murder, to adventure themselves in the neighbourhood of fire-escapes ; these things, howbeit regrettable, are common to

humanity, and may happen to any of us. But amateur bookselling is foul and unnatural; and it is noteworthy that our language, so capable of particularity, contains no distinctive name for the crime. Fortunately it is hardly known to exist. The face of the public being set against it as a flint—and the trade giving such wretched prices.

In book-buying you not infrequently condone an extravagance by the reflection that this particular purchase will be a good investment, sordidly considered: that you are not squandering income but sinking capital. But you know all the time that you are lying. Once possessed, books develop a personality: they take on a touch of warm human life that links them in a manner with our kith and kin. *Non Angli sed Angeli* was the comment of a missionary (old style) on the small human

duodecimos exposed for sale in the Roman market-place ; and many a buyer, when some fair-haired little chattel passed into his possession, must have felt that here was something vendible no more. So of these you may well affirm *Non libri sed liberi*; children now, adopted into the circle, they shall be trafficked in never again.

There is one exception which has sadly to be made—one class of men, of whom I would fain, if possible, have avoided mention, who are strangers to any such scruples. These be Executors—a word to be strongly accented on the penultimate ; for indeed, they are the common headsmen of collections, and most of all do whet their bloody edge for harmless books. Hoary, famous old collections, budding young collections, fair virgin collections of a single author—all go down before the executor's remorseless axe. He careth not

and he spareth not. 'The iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy,' and it is chiefly by the hand of the executor that she doth love to scatter it. May oblivion be his portion for ever!

Of a truth, the foes of the book-lover are not few. One of the most insidious, because he cometh at first in friendly, helpful guise, is the book-binder. Not in that he bindeth books---for the fair binding is the final crown and flower of painful achievement---but because he bindeth not: because the weary weeks lapse by and turn to months, and the months to years, and still the binder bindeth not: and the heart grows sick with hope deferred. Each morn the maiden binds her hair, each spring the honeysuckle binds the cottage-porch, each autumn the harvester binds his sheaves, each winter the iron frost binds lake and stream, and still the

bookbinder he bindeth not. Then a secret voice whispereth : 'Arise, be a man, and slay him !' Take him grossly, full of bread, with all his crimes broad-blown, as flush as May; At gaming, swearing, or about some act That hath no relish of salvation in it !' But when the deed is done, and the floor strewn with fragments of binder—still the books remain unbound. You have made all that horrid mess for nothing, and the weary path has to be trodden over again. As a general rule, the man in the habit of murdering bookbinders though he performs a distinct service to society, only wastes his own time and takes no personal advantage.

And even supposing that after many days your books return to you in leathern surcoats bravely tricked with gold, you have scarce yet weathered the Cape and sailed into halcyon seas. For these books

—well, you kept them many weeks before binding them, that the oleaginous printer's-ink might fully dry before the necessary hammering; you forbore to open the pages, that the autocratic binder might refold the sheets if he pleased; and now that all is over — *consummatum est* — still you cannot properly enjoy the harvest of a quiet mind. For these purple emperors are not to be read in bed, nor during meals, nor on the grass with a pipe on Sundays; and these brief periods are all the whirling times allow you for sordid serious reading. Still, after all, you have them; you can at least pulverize your friends with the sight; and what have they to show against them: Probably some miserable score or so of half-bindings, such as lead you scornfully to quote the hackneyed couplet concerning the poor Indian whose untutored mind

clothes him before but leaves him bare behind. Let us thank the gods that such things are: that to some of us they give not poverty nor riches but a few good books in whole bindings. Dowered with these and (if it be vouchsafed) a cup of Burgundy that is sound even if it be not old, we can leave to others the foaming grape of Eastern France that was vintaged in '74, and with it the whole range of shilling shockers,—the Barmecidal feast of the American novelist—yea, even the countless series that tell of Eminent Women and Successful Men.

CHEAP KNOWLEDGE *

WHEN at times it happens to me that I 'gin to be aweary of the sun, and to find the fair apple of life dust and ashes at the core—just because, perhaps, I can't afford Melampus Brown's last volume of poems in large paper, but must perforce condescend upon the two-and-sixpenny edition for the million—then I bring myself to a right temper by recalling to memory a sight which now and again in old days would touch the heart of me to a happier pulsation. In the long, dark winter evenings, outside some shop window whose gaslights flared brightest into the chilly street, I would see some lad—sometimes

* From "Pagan Papers," by Kenneth Grahame. Copyright, John Lane, New York.

even a girl—book in hand, heedless of cold and wet, of aching limbs and straining eyes, careless of jostling passers-by, of rattle and turmoil behind them and about, their happy spirits far in an enchanted world: till the ruthless shopman turned out the gas and brought them rudely back to the bitter reality of cramped legs and numbed fingers. ‘My brother!’ or ‘My sister!’ I would cry inwardly, feeling the link that bound us together. They possessed, for the hour, the two gifts most precious to the student—light and solitude: the true solitude of the roaring street.

Somehow this vision rarely greets me now. Probably the Free Libraries have supplanted the flickering shop-lights; and every lad and lass can enter and call for Miss Braddon and batten thereon ‘in luxury’s sofa-lap of leather;’ and of course this boon is appreciated and profited by,

and we shall see the divine results in a year or two. And yet sometimes, like the dear old Baron in the *Red Lamp*, 'I wonder?'

For myself, public libraries possess a special horror, as of lonely wastes and dragon-haunted fens. The stillness and the heavy air, the feeling of restriction and surveillance, the mute presence of these other readers, 'all silent and all damned,' combine to set up a nervous irritation fatal to quiet study. Had I to choose, I would prefer the windy street. And possibly others have found that the removal of checks and obstacles makes the path which leads to the divine mountain-tops less tempting, now that it is less rugged. So full of human nature are we all—still—despite the Radical missionaries that labour in the vineyard. Before the National Gallery was extended and rearranged,

there was a little *St. Catherine* by Pinturicchio that possessed my undivided affections. In those days she hung near the floor, so that those who would worship must grovel; and little I grudged it. Whenever I found myself near Trafalgar Square with five minutes to spare I used to turn in and sit on the floor before the object of my love, till gently but firmly replaced on my legs by the attendant. She hangs on the line now, in the grand new room; but I never go to see her. Somehow she is not my *St. Catherine* of old. Doubtless Free Libraries affect many students in the same way: on the same principle as that now generally accepted—that it is the restrictions placed on vice by our social code which makes its pursuit so peculiarly agreeable.

But even when the element of human nature has been fully allowed for, it re-

mains a question whether the type of mind that a generation or two of Free Libraries will evolve is or is not the one that the world most desiderates; and whether the spare reading and consequent fertile thinking necessitated by the old, or gas-lamp, style is not productive of sounder results. The cloyed and congested mind resulting from the free run of these grocers' shops to omnivorous appetites (and all young readers are omnivorous) bids fair to produce a race of literary resurrection-men: a result from which we may well pray to be spared. Of all forms of lettered effusiveness that which exploits the original work of others and professes to supply us with right opinions thereanent is the least wanted. And whether he take to literary expression by pen or only wag the tongue of him, the grocer's boy of letters is sure to prove a prodigious

bore. The Free Library, if it be fulfilling the programme of its advocates, is breeding such as he by scores.

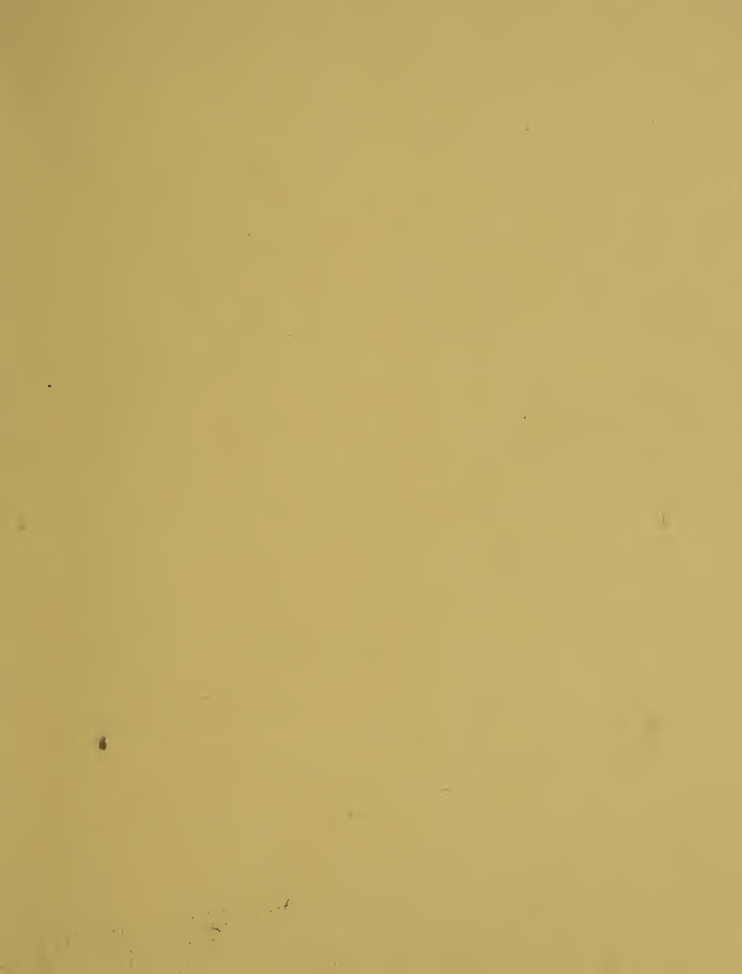
But after all there is balm in Gilead; and much joy and consolation may be drawn from the sorrowful official reports, by which it would appear that the patrons of these libraries are confining their reading with a charming unanimity, exclusively to novels. And indeed they cannot do better; there is no more blessed thing on earth than a good novel, not the least merit of which is that it induces a state of passive, unconscious enjoyment, and never frenzies the reader to go out and put the world right. Next to fairy tales—the original world-fiction—our modern novels may be ranked as our most precious possessions; and so it has come to pass that I shall now cheerfully pay my five shillings, or ten shillings, or whatever it may shortly be,

in the pound towards the Free Library :
convinced at last that the money is not
wasted in training exponents of the sub-
jectivity of this writer and the objectivity
of that, nor in developing fresh imitators
of dead discredited styles, but is righteous-
ly devoted to the support of wholesome,
honest, unpretending novel-reading.

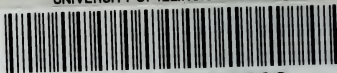


A DOMESTIC EVENT

Back from a tedious holiday
He comes, and—Duty first—he looks
Around for his familiar books ;
But all the room's in disarray !
He searches; what's the matter, eh?
He hunts in most unheard of nooks.
'Were robbers here, or were they cooks,
Who seized, who stole my Books away?
Not one! What wind has blown about,
What tempest can have tossed them out,
And cleared the shelves that used to hold
them?'
No cook, no thief, no tempest came,
His lady wife 'tis she's to blame
Who carried off the Books—and sold
them!



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